

Listening Session Summary Wednesday, December 7, 2005

Council Members Present: Elaine Brown – Michigan Food and Farming Systems, Jean Chabut – MI Dept. of Community Health, Todd Regis – United Food and Commercial Workers 951, Wayne Wood – MI Farm Bureau

Mary Robb, MSU Extension Muskegon County Director, facilitated the session, and began with brief remarks and instructions for those present. Keith Creagh, MDA Deputy Director, presented the work and the charge of the Council, and introduced the Council Members present. Approximately 50 people were present throughout the listening session.

There were nine oral presentations of comments, and one written submission.

- 1) David Schroeder, Consultant for the Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force (ENTF). Mr. Schroeder described the work of the ENTF in meeting the basic needs of Kent County's most vulnerable populations. Mr. Schroeder made the following recommendations to the MFPC:
 - a) Study existing anti-hunger and food security initiatives in MI.
 - b) Work in collaboration with some of these programs to expand participation in federal food assistance programs (this will translate into cash flowing into the state as well).
 - c) Maintain open communication lines between the various groups working on these issues around the state.
 - d) Assist these organizations and groups with funding and advocacy at both the federal and state levels.
 - e) Be sure to include food insecure consumers in the work and priorities of the MFPC.

- 2) Marsha DeHollander, Program Coordinator for the ACCESS Food Pantry Network for Kent County. Ms. DeHollander described the overall work of the ACCESS Food Pantry Network and one of its specific projects, the ACCESS/ Spectrum Health Nutritional Options for Wellness, wherein health professionals "prescribe" certain pantry foods to meet the needs of chronically ill and economically disadvantaged clients recently released from the hospital, and the pantry fills the prescriptions for the clients. Ms. DeHollander recommended that the MFPC assist ACCESS and other similar organizations in creating partnerships and obtain funding. She specifically noted Mobile Pantries as an initiative that, if funded, could bring fresh food directly to populations in need.

Ms. DeHollander also spoke on behalf of Paul Baumgartner of the Grand Rapids Public School System. Mr. Baumgartner expressed concern over low levels of participation in summer lunch programs, which replace the school lunch program during the summer, and proposed the idea of seasonally adjusted food stamps (with an increase over the summer to assist families in feeding children at home.)

- 3) Ken Dahlberg, of the Citizens Network for Michigan Food Democracy. Dr. Dahlberg spoke on behalf of the Citizens Network for Michigan Food Democracy, an emerging grassroots group that seeks to investigate and promulgate long-term alternative solutions to food security, food/farm system sustainability, and healthier communities and local economic development. Dr. Dahlberg presented five key needs for the MFPC to address in its work.
 - a) Institutionalize, fund and provide a long-term mandate for the MFPC.
 - b) Create an interagency task force to lead a planning effort to create a network of decentralized emergency food reserves to provide food in the event of a disaster.
 - c) Commission studies to investigate ways to reduce the life-cycle energy costs of food production, processing, transportation, distribution, refrigeration, preparation and disposal. This should include a critical look at biofuel development in terms of net energy gains.
 - d) Strengthen and integrate local food system and health planning.
 - e) Seek various means (such as listening sessions) to provide opportunities for citizens, grassroots groups and non-profits and others who might not have access to policymakers to voice their concerns. This will aid in developing an active and aware food citizenry.

- 4) Cynthia Price. Ms Price made the clarification that she was not speaking as a representative of any organization, but rather as a concerned and interested citizen and activist. She had two main points to make:
 - a) The MFPC should align its work and cooperate with the on-going Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) Kellogg-funded policy initiative working to inform/reform the 2007 reauthorization of the Federal Farm Bill. The CFSC is also developing a framework for communicating with the general public about food systems. This resource might be useful to the MFPC.
 - b) The MFPC is not as inclusive and/or representative as it should be. Specifically, Ms. Price feels that there should be more representation on the Council of people already involved in food *systems* work in Michigan (as opposed to people involved in the various segments of the food system.)

- 5) Charles Goodman, farmer. Mr. Goodman expressed frustration over the lack of consistency in zoning and regulations between municipalities. He recommended that the MFPC should promote greater publicity of Right to Farm Act provisions that supercede municipality regulations. This might contribute to greater farm viability in Michigan.

- 6) Allen Meeusen, Sunrise Orchards. Mr. Meeusen suggested that increased cooperation between Michigan DNR and MDA on the topic of deer management would strengthen farm viability in Michigan. Mr. Meeusen sustains thousands of dollars in

crop loss to deer every year, and he has had trouble with the permitting requirements to control the deer. Mr. Meeusen also made the point that the various licensing and permitting requirements for direct marketing are cumbersome and expensive. This “double taxing” (multiple permit requirements) influences agricultural viability in Michigan. Mr. Meeusen also recommended that the MFPC investigate opportunities for the State to further publicize Michigan agriculture and promote its products. Mr. Meeusen suggested kiosks at rest areas and farmers’ markets to strengthen the viability of Michigan farms.

7) Sally Triant, Mixed Greens and Sweetwater Local Foods Market. Ms. Triant recommended that the MFPC work to connect and support organizations and initiatives already working in the State, especially those working on farm-to-school programming. Mixed Greens is working to increase food security and nutrition levels in the Grand Rapids area. Sweetwater Local Foods Market sells only locally- and organically-grown foods and humanely raised animal products. Ms. Triant also recommended that the MFPC support/promote the creation of a farmers’ market association to help ensure that small local growers do not get undersold at farmers’ markets by large out-of-state operations that ship their goods to the same markets.

8) Lisa Rose Starner, Executive Director of Mixed Greens. Ms. Starner seconded Ms. Triant’s recommendations. She also emphasized the necessity of educating school children, who are “the next generation of consumers and producers,” on the food system and the value of agriculture. Ms. Starner recommended that the MFPC work to promote the idea that school gardens and garden-based education are critical to children’s education.

9) Joe Colyn, Food Industry Consultant for Originz. Mr. Colyn commended the MFPC for its focus on promoting Michigan foods, and suggested that the MFPC should expand its scope to promote Michigan foods outside of Michigan as well. He also recommended that the MFPC promote water stewardship in its recommendations.

10) Ron Steiner, MSUE Regional Entrepreneurship Educator for Oceana County (written submission). Mr. Steiner recommended that the MFPC work to bring current economic development and entrepreneurial support efforts to bear on agriculture in Michigan.

The session concluded with a reminder that the MFPC welcomes written comments and recommendations at any time and that there will be several more regional listening session opportunities in the near future.